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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: A/S WELCH'S MEETING WITH QATAR'S PM

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Ratney,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) told visiting NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch March 31 that he was not optimistic that the situation in Lebanon would improve anytime soon. He said it is necessary to fix matters with Iran and Syria -- and not isolate Syria -- before improving the situation in Lebanon. In Qatar's view, a greater Shi'a role in Lebanon would harm the entire region, including GCC states. HBJ said the Iranian President is feeling more comfortable, sensing that he's gotten past the nuclear threat issue. A/S Welch briefed HBJ on the Israeli/Palestinian situation and urged Qatar to provide assistance to the Palestinians through the Arab League. Qatar continues to deliver foods and medicines, including inside Gaza, but HBJ said Qatar would not give any more cash for the time being. HBJ recommended keeping negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians secret until there is complete agreement. Qatar, said HBJ, would accept any deal the Palestinians would accept. On bilateral relations, HBJ expressed regret for whatever happened to sour the relationship and said he could not make things right. A/S Welch said he would not give up on righting the relationship or obtaining Qatar's assistance with the Palestinians. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Joined by Charge and P/E Chief, NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch met March 31 with Prime

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Minister/Foreign Minister Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al-Mahmoud, who were joined by Qatar's Ambassador-designate to the U.S., Ali bin Fahad Al-Hajri. HBJ, who attend the Arab League Summit in Damascus with the Amir, told A/S Welch it was important not to isolate Syria. A/S Welch responded that the U.S. is always accused of interfering in Arab League matters, but for the U.S. making progress on resolving important issues is more important than the summit attendance. He added that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had told Secretary Rice that Abbas was pleased with his conversations

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in Damascus. HBJ said this was good news and offered that the Summit in Damascus went smoothly, by and large.

LEBANON, SYRIA, AND IRAN

¶3. (C) Turning to Lebanon, A/S Welch asked HBJ for Qatar's views on how to improve the situation there. HBJ said before fixing Lebanon it is necessary to fix matters with Iran and Syria. Hizballah would need to be included in these conversations, perhaps in a meeting of 4-5 countries including Iran and Syria. HBJ said Qatar had been involved in such an initiative with Oman, but it is too early to hold another discussion so soon after the Arab League Summit. It

is better, HBJ advised, to let a couple of weeks pass after the Summit for tempers to cool.

14. (C) A/S Welch outlined U.S. thinking on Lebanon. The U.S. at the outset hoped for election of a president by consensus. That no longer appears possible. Electing a president with a "50 percent plus one" majority holds big risks, and the March 14 coalition is divided on this approach. That means, observed A/S Welch, we are stuck with the status quo for the time being and need to create an environment conducive to future political change in Lebanon. With the Christians divided, added A/S Welch, it would be good if Christian representation in the Cabinet could be strengthened and if the Shi'a could come into the fold.

15. (C) HBJ said there was not much hope the Shi'a would help. He stressed that electing a president of Lebanon is important, but there are other areas in which Iran and Syria need to be involved and part of the solution. HBJ said the Saudis are frustrated at achieving a workable solution for Lebanon, and it seems both sides of the divide in Lebanon are happy with the status quo. But the status quo is not sustainable for a year to the next parliamentary elections. Lebanon has a weakened government, no functioning parliament, and a "militant hand" in Hizballah. HBJ said Arab governments in general are concerned about the potential for Shi'a Hizballah to play a greater role in Lebanon. "We don't want a greater Shi'a role," declared HBJ, and "we are not pro-Hizballah." The growing power of the Shi'a in the region "harms us here in the Gulf."

16. (C) According to HBJ, the Iranian President is more relaxed and comfortable in his role than before and feels he has gotten past the nuclear threat issue. Qatar and the U.S. are on the same path and have the same fears with respect to a nuclear-armed Iran, but we may have different tactics. HBJ said Arab states, including Qatar, do not want more wars or armed conflicts in the region. Neither the region nor the

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world can afford this. Returning to Lebanon, HBJ predicted "Lebanon will stay like this for a long time" and is likely headed for a bigger clash. One incident could spark a war. HBJ characterized the Lebanese Prime Minister as a friend and someone with whom he speaks every three or four days by phone. HBJ said convincing Syria to open an embassy in Beirut and ease up on border restrictions would be hard. HBJ concluded by saying he is not optimistic.

17. (C) Expressing agreement with much of HBJ's analysis, A/S Welch said the U.S. had been careful to avoid advocating for particular presidential candidates in Lebanon a la France. Noting the U.S. does not talk to Hizballah, A/S Welch nonetheless believed Hizballah does not want a clash or war, an objective bolstered by private communications he had received from leading Lebanese figures. Instead, A/S Welch observed that Hizballah was preparing to win the 2009 parliamentary elections, knowing that better representation in parliament would help Hizballah's fortunes -- and the aims of Syria and Iran. The U.S., said A/S Welch, would continue to support the Central Bank, government, army and other key institutions. The U.S. would continue to talk to the parliamentary leadership, to enjoin that parliament should continue to function. HBJ offered that maintaining a dialogue with all parties is wise, but A/S Welch cautioned that the wisdom of a dialogue depends on its terms. HBJ closed the discussion on Lebanon by offering to share the paper with A/S Welch on Qatar's thinking that he had developed with Omani FM Bin Alawi.

ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIANS

18. (C) On the Palestinian situation, A/S Welch said there is a "real, serious and substantive" political/negotiations

track between the Palestinians and Israel, but the ongoing situation on the ground, and the role of outside actors, must also be addressed. President Bush and Secretary Rice are committed to visiting the region in the weeks ahead, and the U.S. remains fully invested on the ground. A/S Welch reported that there is an intense, private dialogue between the U.S. and Israel on Israeli settlements in Palestinian areas. He stressed the need for the help of Qatar and other Arab states in assisting the Palestinians. HBJ said Qatar supports Abbas and provides food and medicines to residents of Gaza. It is not true, however, that Qatar supports Hamas, stressed HBJ. He said he had told Abbas that Hamas must in the end be with him to sign an agreement with Israel. HBJ advised A/S Welch of the importance of keeping any negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians secret and not leaking details before there is a final, agreed upon package. It would be best if the Arab League members had visibility on the secret deal, but HBJ said Qatar would accept any deal with Israel that the Palestinians accept. It is up to the Palestinians, he emphasized, to decide what is acceptable.

¶9. (C) A/S Welch said it was unlikely Abbas would approach Hamas anytime soon. Returning to the need for assistance, A/S Welch asked Qatar to help the Palestinian Authority via the Arab League. HBJ responded that Qatar had supported the Authority more than any other Arab League country, having given 200 million USD through the Arab League in 2007. Qatar's six-month pledge, he explained, finished about the time that Gaza went into upheaval. Qatar continues to deliver food and medicines inside Gaza, but HBJ said Qatar would not give any more cash for the time being. A/S Welch pointed out that 58 percent of the Palestinian Authority Budget is spent in Gaza. Prime Minister Fayyad, he stressed, does not have enough money to meet his payroll. It is important not to let him go broke. HBJ responded that he would take a fresh look. A/S Welch underscored that any assistance would make a difference. The situation on the ground concerns us, added A/S Welch, and we don't have a good answer in Gaza. The U.S. will continue to work through the issues of roadblocks and checkpoints in the West Bank, but making progress in Gaza is much harder.

QATAR SEEKS MORE TRUST, UNDERSTANDING, AND DIALOGUE

¶10. (C) HBJ said money was not all that separated the U.S. from Qatar. He lamented that Qatar is not part of many discussions. "Maybe you don't trust us, but we've been good to our word. Maybe we don't say what you like as others do, but they don't deliver." We help the Israelis a lot and they know this, referencing conversations with Israeli officials in Doha as evidence. HBJ said he had been told that President Bush complained about Qatar to other GCC states during his recent trip to the region. A/S Welch said he believed the President took issue with Al Jazeera coverage,

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and so did everyone at one time or another. HBJ responded that Arab media in the region is worse than Al Jazeera by pandering to public opinion. Qatar, HBJ continued, sees the U.S. as our ally and friend. HBJ expressed regret for whatever happened to sour the relationship and said he could not make things right. He had tried and failed.

¶11. (C) A/S Welch said he would not give up on righting the relationship or obtaining Qatar's assistance with the Palestinians. HBJ said strategic partnerships require trust, understanding, and dialogue. He advocated a comprehensive relationship in all respects. A/S Welch pointed out that helping the Palestinians amounted to helping them more than helping the U.S.

¶12. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this message.
RATNEY